The Builder.

No. CCCCLXXV.

SATURDAY, MARCH 13, 1852.

THE proper maintenance of the ancient tombs of WESTMINSTER ABBEY concerns the whole kingdom. They form a visible history of the utmost interest and importance; they are evidences of the state of the arts at the time when they were executed unquestionable, and not to be matched; they appeal to, instruct, and refine those who visit them: no equivalent could be given for their loss,—they are priceless! Mr. Donaldson's paper on the condition of these tombs, published in our journal, has informed English lovers of art and students of history (who, of course, never visit a place so near at hand as Westminster Abbey), of the condition of these treasures, and will, it is to be hoped, gain for them that judicious attention which is imperatively demanded.

"Thinke how many royall bones
Sleep within these heaps of stones.
Here they lie, had realmes and lands,
Who now want strength to lift their hands."

The subject was further considered and discussed at the Institute of British Architects on the 8th inst. Mr. Fowler in the chair; and we think we shall advance the object sought by giving publicity to the remarks that were then made.

Mr. Donaldson, in opening the discussion, drew attention to some information which he had received in addition to that in his former paper, and read a letter from Mr. C. H. Smith stating that the green fragments of the mosaic work were not serpentine, as he had said, but green porphyry. To show the extent of the injuries done to the tombs at Westminster, Mr. Donaldson produced a rubbing of a brass in the Confessor's Chapel, exhibiting a mere wreck of its original condition, together with a drawing of it restored. A part of this brass had been carried off by one of the workmen at the last coronation to facilitate the erection of a temporary gallery. He then produced a design for the restoration of the Shrine of Edward the Confessor, different in its character to that submitted at the last meeting: at the same time he disclaimed any interference with the Abbey architect; his object in this solely was to enliven his subject and show what might be done. Observing that the decayed state of the royal tombs offered temptations to still further wanton injury, he strongly urged the importance of restoring them, and invited those who were present to express their opinions on the subject.

Mr. G. G. Scott said he would first offer some remarks on the history and state of the monuments in question, and then on their restoration. The principal works were the group of tombs and pavements executed in glass and marble mosaic, by Italian artists in the time of Henry III.; viz. the floor in front of the Abbey Altar, that of the Confessor's Chapel, the Shrine of the Saint, the tomb of Henry III. and those of his children and grand-children in the ambulatory around the choir. Besides these a small mosaic pavement beneath the step of Henry V.'s tomb had recently been brought to light, and was proved to commemorate the son of William DeValence: and this was of the same class as the above memorials. On the history of these works he had not obtained much information; but it was clear that Abbot Ware, who was elected in 1263, was at Rome in 1267, and caused the altar pavement to be executed in 1268, immediately after his return. He, in fact, brought the materials and workmen with him from Italy. The name of the artist who executed the mosaic floor was *Odericus*, and the glass mosaics on the tombs were by one *Peter*, who was described as a Roman citizen. These facts were proved by the inscriptions still existing. Mr. Scott then proceeded to notice in detail the venerable Shrine of Edward the Confessor. Alluding to the seven trefoil-headed niches in its lower portion, three on each side, he quoted authorities to show that they were intended for sick pilgrims to kneel in, when seeking restoration to health by the miraculous power of the saint. It appeared that before the present addition to the upper part was made, there was a carved wooden cover over the shrine, which was raised up to display the latter to the worshippers; three holes might still be seen in the vaulting of the roof above, which were no doubt made for that purpose. From the old historians, it was also plain that the shrine itself, or feretory, was adorned with gold and precious stones. In the Abbey Library there was an illuminated manuscript, which contained a representation of this monument, showing the lower part of stone, and upon that a shrine of gold of peculiar form, with a representation of the king in his robes, probably in enamel, on one of the inclined surfaces. With an indifference to minute accuracy common at that time, the whole of the seven niches were in this drawing shown on one side of the monument; but he thought it did not follow that the upper part was incorrectly delineated, because the monks no doubt attached more importance to the golden shrine than to the stone monument beneath it. No doubt an altar stood at the west end of this shrine, and he thought it probably remained there till the Civil Wars. A hole made by some accident at the west end of the monument was filled up by a panel from some tomb of the seventeenth century, which confirmed that opinion. A wooden altar-table had since been temporarily used at coronations to place the regalia upon, and this was described, at the coronation of James I. as "the altar of Saint Edward." Probably Mr. Donaldson's suggestion, in his first restoration, that pillars were placed at the angles of the shrine to carry lights, was correct, for many lights were burnt about it; but whether placed around the gilt shrine, or on the floor around the marble monument, was doubtful. Mr. Scott then considered the design of the west end of the monument, in reference to the large slab inserted in it, evidently not in its original position, though, as he believed, not far from it; and he produced a sketch in illustration of this opinion. Much injury was probably done to the monument at the Reformation, when the feretory, with its precious decorations was removed; but there were probably some repairs executed in the time of Mary; and the evidence appeared to give an earlier date, perhaps this same time, to the wooden upper part than its style denoted. After a few remarks on the other monuments, the speaker proceeded to the question of restoration. Admitting the accuracy of Mr. Donaldson's description of the melancholy state of these monuments, what could be done with them? If renewed, would they be the monuments originally erected? If the beautiful modern glass mosaics were introduced in the shrine, it would no longer be the work of Peter, the Roman citizen. Besides, the very injuries these tombs had received gave them interest; they were wounds that proved the identity, and if restored the tombs might cease to be regarded with the reverence they now inspired. On the other side of the question, however, much might be said, and he would not attempt to settle it.

Mr. Godwin said this was a question in which he had long been interested; he had published some remarks on Westminster Abbey as long as eight or nine years ago, wherein he had urged the necessity of attention to these monuments. There was no building, indeed, in this country of which we might be so proud as Westminster Abbey. He knew nothing like it: and certainly the most wonderful spot in this wonderful building was that which contained the shrine of the Confessor, where around one of the oldest of our sovereigns were gathered so many of their race. It was a great delight to visit this interesting spot, where, apart from the noise and bustle of to-day (and yet so close to it), the sight of that remarkable series of monuments inspired thoughts which could not but be most healthful and elevating. He was sure that every person present must be anxious that means should be immediately taken to preserve such valuable memorials. He hoped it would not be inferred from what had been said that these were all the works of Italian artists. England might claim a considerable amount of artistic knowledge and skill, even in the reign of Henry III. The meeting probably knew a paper in the "Archæologia," on Queen Eleanor's Crosses and Monuments, by the Rev. Joseph Hunter. In this he gave the names of those who were engaged upon them, and they were nearly all Englishmen, such as William of Stowe, Michael of Canterbury, Alexander of Abingdon, who was also called the *Imaginator*, Ralph of Chichester, and William of Ireland. Nor was he disposed to give up Master William Torell, whom Mr. Donaldson and others seemed really anxious to prove an Italian under the name of Torelli, and so get rid of him. He was always spoken of as "William Torell," and there seemed no reason to doubt about his being an Englishman; but even if he were an Englishman, Mr. Donaldson thought he might have employed an Italian to execute the bronze work. He, the speaker, saw no reason to suppose this. Torell was employed on the effigy of Henry III. as well as that of Queen Eleanor; he did the great statue at Lincoln, too; and if he had been merely a middle man, employing other workmen, the names of those men would probably have been given, for the accounts of the works were particular in this respect. With regard to the question of restoration, he should regret most deeply, and he thought that would be the general feeling, if any mere theory should be carried out. The subject should be approached with almost religious care. He would not place a metal shrine, or a wooden one, upon the stone monument of the Confessor, though either

For more information on OCR and PDF Compression visit our website